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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JIM WEBB, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, our hope for years to come, thank You for bringing us together again. Lord, we have missed each other and the separation from friends and peers has generated good memories. Our time apart often reminds us that we need each other and that we best honor You by striving to become models of unity. Lord, we thank You for the opportunities this recess provided for family time and fellowship, for relaxation and rest, for productive contacts and service. Now, as we begin anew the hard work of implementing decisions and solving problems, give our lawmakers and their staff members patience, endurance, energy, and wisdom.

We pray in Your sovereign Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JIM WEBB led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, September 8, 2008.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable JIM WEBB, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WEBB thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I had the good fortune last month to go to Afghanistan. It was, of course, tremendously educational. We had the opportunity—a number of five Senators, Democrats and Republicans—to visit with our allies in Kurdistan and Kazakhstan. It was a good trip. Then, of course, we completed our trip by going to look—which I had not done—at medical facilities in Germany. All of the troops who are injured or hurt in any way in Iraq or Afghanistan go through that facility. So it was a good trip.

It made it very apparent to me that we should do everything within our power to pass the Defense authorization bill because 7 years after 9/11, we all recognize that our No. 1 enemy, Osama bin Laden, is still free, and al-Qaida has rebuilt its safe haven, it appears, in Pakistan. The central front of the war on terror, we have learned, cannot be won in Iraq. Yet that is where our troops are located. Our treasure and our strategic focus remains in Iraq, but it should be other places. That is why it is so critical to pass a Defense authorization bill that not only supports our troops and our families but also takes a step toward a smarter war on terror.

The Defense authorization bill gives the troops a much needed pay raise of

almost 4 percent. It also renews a number of special pay increases provided to troops who fill high-skilled areas that were so undermanned. We all know because of what has happened with the Bush and now McCain efforts, troops are in Iraq and our resources are in Iraq. Afghanistan has seen a surge in violence and suicide attacks are up. We have more coalition forces being killed in Afghanistan than in Iraq, roadside bombings have increased, and opium production is up with Afghanistan producing 93 percent of the world's opium. So we have to refocus on Afghanistan.

Our troops have done a tremendous job in Iraq and, of course, in Afghanistan. It does your heart a lot to be able to visit with those troops in the battlefield as we did. So it is time we get this Defense authorization bill passed. We have to do that. We need the funds for the programs in Afghanistan that are critical to winning the peace that have been ignored for far too long.

This legislation increases the size of the Army to 532,000; the Marine Corps, 194,000; along with other steps to improve readiness and reduce the strain and improve the capabilities of our Armed Forces. We have had other occasions with our Republican allies to pass a Defense authorization bill in the Senate, but we haven't been successful in doing that. So I hope we are allowed to go to the bill.

I have had a number of conversations with Senator LEVIN, the chairman of the committee. Each conversation I have with him, he tells me he is going to confer with Senator WARNER, the former chairman and now ranking member of that most important committee. We want to get on the bill. We want to get the bill passed. This bill is not an opportunity for people to vent their frustration on all of the issues that are floating around this country. This is a bill that deals with the safety and security of our Nation and the well-being of our troops. So when we get on the bill, I hope we can move forward and complete legislation on this

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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